

A Church Alive Series: Preparing for the Promise

And being assembled together with them, he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, he said, "you have heard of Me". – Acts 1:4

Ushering in a New Era

Before Jesus died, he left the disciples with information and instructions on what they could expect and how they should live

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. – John 15:16-17

Follow his commands, bear fruit, love each other... these were the marching orders of Jesus. Now while the disciples heard what he said, they were not prepared for all that this would entail. Nor were they expecting that they would have to take the lead once their Teacher was gone. Jesus, knowing their state of mind and heart stayed with them for 40 days after his resurrection to prove that he was who he said, and that God's word, and his word to them, was real.

Change is one of the things that is most difficult for people. There are entire organizations whose job is to facilitate change. Even when it seems to be easy, accepting it and walking in it may be the toughest thing we can face. The disciples were in this place with the transition that was happening. Before Jesus died, they saw a clear path to address the obvious situations in their lives: Jesus needed to be set up as king over Israel, to overthrow the Roman rule, and to bring Israel back to its status as a free kingdom

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" – Acts 1:6

For the disciples, Jesus' return did not signify anything new. Rather, it allowed them to go back to their former way of thinking and acting: "Jesus is back, so we can relax and let him do his thing". All along however, Jesus had other plans in the works... plans that would change the disciples' way of thinking, acting and living forever. This "new era" is not only something that can look at historically, as an event that happened 2000 years ago, but a change that God wants to institute in our lives, our thinking and our actions. He wants us to be a people that not only live by the teachings of Jesus... he is looking to create a people who are infused with his Spirit who are experiencing the new era of his promise as they walk out their lives.

The Promise of the Father

When Jesus was speaking with the disciples, he told them that they had to wait for something before they did anything else. Jesus had spoken of this before, but now needed to bring it back to the forefront. For Jesus, this was more than just giving the disciples more things to do or consider: **Jesus' command and actions lined the disciples up with the plan of God that was larger than their part in it.** Similarly for us, many times when God is at work in and through us, the path he takes is not because he is working out a lesson specifically for us, but rather it is to line us up with a larger work that he is already doing.

...he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father...

Jesus could have simply told them to wait for the Holy Spirit. He spoke often enough of the Holy Spirit that they would have known what he was talking about, but he chose not to do that. In fact, he could have just told them to wait, but he specifically said, the "Promise of the Father". It was important for the disciples that they understood that the emphasis was not on their waiting. While their action of waiting was important, it was not what they were to focus on. They were to focus on the object of their waiting: God's promise. Similarly for us, God will call us into an action or discipline, and if we are not careful we can get stuck in the action while missing the main point

Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." – Matthew 7:22-23

The disciples could have spent their time in the discipline of waiting, all the while losing faith in the one that they were supposed to be following. Even Peter, who declared that Jesus was the Son of the Living God, in the next breath, rebuked him for what he revealed about God's plan for him. Jesus had to reset Peter's expectations of where his heart and mind were to be.

...The Promise of the Father, which, he said, "You have heard of Me."

For Jesus, there was no question as to what he promise was. It was not simply a statement, a theology, or a doctrine. The promise was something that God was going to do. He was going to send the Spirit of God to take his place as the representation of God in the earth

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. – John 14:16-17

What the disciples had recognized as something that was around them would now be in them. What they saw in operation in Jesus, they would see in themselves. Jesus called this "The Promise". Why? He needed to make a distinction between the

expected religious life of the day and the new era that he was ushering in. The old way of thinking was that scholarship, blindly following or just learning the ways of the master was enough to turn you into a master yourself. Jesus wanted to show them that the life they were being called into, this new life they would be living was not simply because they had spent enough time around Jesus to replicate what he did. They had not passed “discipleship school” to become certified as a leader.

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **uneducated and untrained men**, they marveled. **And they realized that they had been with Jesus**. And seeing the man **who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.** – Acts 4:13-14*

Jesus referred to the coming of the Holy Spirit as “The Promise” because his coming was not based on the activity of the disciples, but solely on the one who gave the promise. God said he would do this, and Jesus was aligning the disciples to God’s Word, not so they could “open the door”, or make it happen, but rather so they would be in position to receive the fullness of The Promise when it happened, and that they would be used in the way God had fashioned on that day. When God moves us into position, often times it doesn’t look the way we expect it, but it is so that we can both receive and give fully in the accomplishment of His will.

*The Lord is not slack concerning **his promise** as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. – II Peter 3:9*

A Promise Not Passive

And he said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” – Acts 1:7-8

The disciples were looking for what Jesus was going to do to rectify their situations. “Jesus, what will you do for me?” Jesus turned the tables on their focus, so that they would have power to do things for Jesus.

But Simon answered and said to him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing. Nevertheless at your word I will let down the net.” And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their net was breaking... and Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” – Luke 5:5-10 abridged

Jesus ushered in a new era, not just with his death and resurrection, but also with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. A new era marked not by Jesus’ ability to do things for us, but rather by him giving us the ability through the Holy Spirit to do things for him. We do it by lining ourselves up to His word and His promise, so that when God moves we are in position to receive and walk in it fully.

Reflection:

- How does God's promise make you think differently about your life?
- Do you think you have stopped or aided God in bringing His promise to pass in your life? Why?
- How does your life line up with the larger plan of God? Do you see God at work through you for others?
- Is your life in Christ about what God can do for you, or what you can do for Him?

Next Week:

- Why was (is) it necessary to wait?
- Who is the Holy Spirit?